

*The*  
DUTCH SCHOOL  
*of*  
PAINTING







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THE DUTCH SCHOOL





TERBORCH

Helena van der Schalke  
(*Amsterdam, Rijks Museum*)



# THE DUTCH SCHOOL *of* PAINTING

*by*

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LONDON  
THE MEDICI SOCIETY

PRINTED IN ENGLAND, 1929



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## THE DUTCH SCHOOL OF PAINTING

IT is unfortunate that the political accidents of history should have robbed Dutch painting, in the popular view, of its legitimate ancestry, in such a way as to produce the impression that the Dutch School was a sudden and isolated outburst of the 17th century : for it was nothing of the kind. Many painters are commonly called Flemish, who were in fact as Dutch as Rembrandt himself ; and on the other hand, it is rare to find, on the part of writers upon the earlier art of the Low Countries, sufficient acknowledgment of the large part played by artists of Walloon descent : for example, it is too often forgotten that the real name of Rogier van der Weyden was not in the Teutonic form by which he is commonly known, but in the Gallic form of Rogier de la Pasture.

Thus while it is perfectly true that the interdependence of the two groups of painters was so close as to make their separate consideration almost an impossibility, it is equally true that Dutch painting of the 17th century had scarcely less claim to be descended from the "Flemish School" of the 15th century, than had the 17th century Flemings. Jan van Eyck himself, if he was born at Maes Eyck, was near a Dutchman as makes no matter. Dirk Bouts was a Dutchman pure and simple ; so were Geerten tot Sint Jans and Gerard David of Oudewater : and though it is true that Bruges and Ghent and Antwerp bulk more largely in the early history of painting in the Low Countries, Haarlem, Leyden and Amsterdam also played an important part in its development, and from quite an early period in the 16th century, it begins to be comparatively easy to distinguish a growing divergence between the Dutch and Flemish lines of progress.

It was not, however, until the Dutch declared openly for religious and political independence that their national characteristics found full expression in their art, and consequently it is generally accepted that the study of Dutch art as such should begin about the middle of the 16th century. By the end of that century, the abortive effort of Flanders in the direction of freedom had died down, and for another half century at least, the art of Flanders was definitely linked with traditions not its own ; and simultaneously, Dutch art becomes almost aggressively Dutch, a

home-grown product with a tendency to insist upon its own limitations, and to turn those limitations into its outstanding virtues.

## §

As was natural in a new community, depending tremendously upon the efforts and enthusiasm of individuals for its very existence, the earliest art of Holland which can be called Dutch is for the most part portraiture, and the Dutch portrait painting, abandoning the graces of Italy and cutting itself adrift from the court tradition of its former Spanish masters, becomes definitely and consciously the art of cataloguing features and possessions. It turns deliberately towards Germany for its technical inspiration and towards its own immediate surroundings for its models. The freedom of Holland was the result of a popular and universal sentiment, and while the achievement of that freedom naturally had its heroes, the nation, once free, became as nearly democratic in its outlook as the nearness of the century to the middle ages permitted. Consequently, Dutch art, as we understand the term now, was from the beginning the art of a bourgeois nation, owning allegiance neither to Court nor Church, and advertising at every turn the delight of the Dutchman in the fact that he was beholden to no man either for ideas or ideals. Probably the newly liberated Holland was the first country in Europe after the Venetian Republic to foster the domestic pride which caused each man, however simple, to regard his house as his castle, and to lay upon the arts the task of ministering to that personal home pride. Not only is the art of Holland bourgeois, but it is domestic, with a domesticity of a distinctively middle class character, and beginning with the family portrait, the Dutchman went on naturally to portraits of his town and its surrounding landscape, his possessions, his pots and pans and the like. To him there was nothing incongruous in the application of the art of painting to the representation of anything in his everyday life in which he was in the least interested, and the ultimate result of this outlook (which was shared by patron and artist), was that the artist proceeded to discover in the most ordinary objects and the most apparently uninspiring conditions, the beauty which is essential to the development of the painter's craft. It is impossible to say that the Dutch artist exercises an elevating influence, if we confine the use of that phrase to the



elevation of the mind beyond and above its normal surroundings, but on the other hand, it is impossible to say that any artist in the world has done more than the Dutchman to reveal the beauty of common things.

If we grant this as our major premiss, we are able at once to approach the consideration of the Dutch school with perfect freedom from those prepossessions in favour of fantasy and imagination, of religious and political and social exaltation, which constitute the natural starting point of the appreciation of the art of Italy or Spain, or even that of aristocratic England in the 18th century. To put it bluntly, it demands only a little common sense, a good deal of observation and a great deal more sentiment, and the sound sagacity of the nation which produced it preserves us from the necessity for sentimentality. It is very difficult to differentiate between the essential value of the "Portrait of a Child" by Cornelis de Vos and Van Miereveldt's "Portrait of a Child with a Parrot," although the one is essentially Flemish and the other is essentially Dutch. In the former, there is just that touch of fantasy which is perfectly proper to the Fleming but utterly foreign to the Dutch. In the latter, there is just that spice of humour which is essentially Dutch, and—without denying the Flemish the saving grace of humour in his own kind—entirely un-Flemish. Van Miereveldt is the type of a large group of Dutch painters, known and unknown, in the 16th century, who made it their business to represent vividly, realistically and sympathetically the personalities presented to them at that very haphazard which made our own Romney speak impatiently of "this cursed face painting." The remarkable difference between the Dutchman and the Fleming is this :—that whereas the Fleming regarded his subject as the starting point for his own artistic and psychological experience, the Dutchman allowed himself to be absorbed in the person he set out to represent, and used every means to present his original in as lifelike a form as possible without regard to its reaction upon his personal consciousness as a man. The beauty of his pictures came, as it were, by the way, and was not a primary object of his work, and consequently, the Dutchman developed very slowly as a creator, seeing that he started from the point of view that it was his business to represent rather than to interpret.

This Dutch point of view was stimulated (though it was perfectly natural to the artist himself) by the fact that from the end of the 16th

century onwards, the Dutch people with their growing independence and concurrently growing prosperity, were essentially a picture buying people. It was not until the end of the 17th century that the English diarist Evelyn noted the extraordinary propensity of the Dutch for buying pictures, but what he then noted was the result of a century of the steady growth of a habit ; and what is more, the Dutchman did not buy pictures because it was the proper thing to do, but because he wanted them and liked to hang them on his walls. If he could not buy good pictures he bought bad ones, and there are thousands of perfectly genuine 17th century pictures wandering about salerooms to-day which were never worth more and which never fetched more than the few shillings which they command at the present time. We have only to look at an interior by Vermeer or Terborch to realise that Dutch houses were not complete without pictures upon their walls, and that the character and subject of those pictures was governed not nearly so much by artistic instinct as by interest in and enjoyment of the subjects that they represented.

There can be no less inspiring conditions than these for the artists of any age or nationality, and it is perfectly easy to understand that in any great concourse of masterpieces of the Dutch School, we see scarcely more than the supreme types of a number of groups of subjects which were popular in the worst sense of the word in Holland in the 17th century. There was absolutely nothing in the external conditions under which the Dutch painter worked to stimulate any great achievement. If any Dutchman of the 17th century became a great painter, it was solely due to the fact that he was in himself and of himself a great artist. The greatness of men like Hals, Rembrandt and Vermeer is all the greater in that it is rather a conquest of than a response to the conditions under which they worked.

## §

A striking development in Dutch painting which is not accounted for by these conditions is that of landscape painting. It is of course impossible to assert that the Dutch painters of the 17th century were the originators of landscape painting as we now understand it, for the Flemings were far ahead of them in the inception of the idea that landscape was worth painting for its own sake ; the development of the landscape sense in



Holland is in the first place a by-product of Dutch patriotism, and in the second place an outcome of climatic and geographical conditions. One of its most noteworthy characteristics is a sense of what may be described as accidental composition in landscape, and this is not surprising in view of the fact that the natural instinct for beauty of landscape is most progressive in those countries in which the preponderating element in landscape is sky. We have only to consider the parallel development of English landscape painting—parallel though later by at least a century—to realise that the natural habitat of the landscape painter is a flat country. No English landscape painter, with the outstanding exception of Richard Wilson, was a native of a country in the least mountainous, and it is only in surroundings of wide perspectives that the artist, seeking for freedom in compositional inspiration, has the least chance of self-realisation. These were the conditions which produced the landscape sense in Holland, and it was natural that out of these conditions came such painters as Jan van Goyen, Salaman van Ruysdael, Jakob van Ruisdael and Hobbema; and furthermore, it was not merely local patriotism, but also landscape sense transferred to the town, which brought into being the art of Gerrit Berck-Heyde, de Hoogh and Sanredam. The Dutch landscape painter learned sooner than any other painter in Europe to regard the accidents of light and atmosphere, rather than the actual forms of mountains, plains and buildings, as the essentials of landscape, and consequently, it was in Holland earlier than in any other country that landscape painting became an art separated from all other arts by its genius of opportunism. This genius is precisely the same, making all allowances for its difference of material, as that which discovered beauty in a plate of oysters, or a group of pewter mugs. It is the genius for composition which arises out of the necessity, imposed by outside conditions, of using unpromising material for the creation of beauty.

Truly, the material was unpromising enough in all conscience. As it was upon the character of the peasantry that Dutch freedom was founded—a toilsome, stubborn, materialistic character, exalted only by patriotism, fortified rather than elevated by religion, and glad to seek relief alike from toil and exaltation in the gross pleasures of the flesh—so, quite naturally, the painter could but reflect its reaction against the influence of Court and Church; and seeing that these had been for centuries the

only refining influences in European civilization, he was reduced to seeking inspiration in scenes of swinish brawling and fuddled lust, on the one hand, and in complacent prosperity and, at the very best, elegant respectability on the other. That he found the inspiration, and made beauty out of it, is enormously to his credit.

## §

The obvious ancestor of the peasant genre of Holland is a Fleming, Pieter Brueghel ; and it is perhaps significant that, with the fading hopes of Flemish freedom, more than one Flemish painter whose outlook caused them to seek their subjects in humble life, migrated from Antwerp to Amsterdam, bringing with them a tradition on which the art of Adriaen Brouwer was formed. There was little outlet for humour in Antwerp in the closing years of the 16th century, and the very essence of low life is humour. The only spiritual anodyne for squalor is laughter; and the painter of squalor, if he is to make it tolerable at all, must hold it up to kindly ridicule. Thus, the spirit of Brouwer is the spirit of caricature. The brawls of his boers are as foolish as their laughter, their love-making is as grotesque as their drunkenness. They are held up, not to reproof, but to indulgent, and perhaps rather sympathetic contempt.

As an ill-told jest cannot carry off its coarseness, but is merely disgusting, so a caricature ill-drawn and awkwardly designed loses its only excuse for existence, and becomes merely malicious. The outstanding merits of Brouwer's work are two, both of them technical. One of them is an essential merit, common to all great art—that of firm line and significant design. The other is new, or almost new, in European painting—the quality of rich colour in subdued scale, completely harmonized and based upon a sensitiveness of colour vision excelling even that of the Venetians. The tone of a painting by Brouwer is neither superficial nor arbitrary, but pervasive and derived from acute observation of the facts of interior light : and since he adds to these a lively and intimate humour and, if report be credited, a strong personal predilection for the pleasures he depicts, we have in him the complete caricaturist, the vigorous and authentic commentator of his time. We may at least be thankful that he was spared from sharing the bitterness of Hals, to whom he is said to have been apprenticed, for it is his obvious enjoyment of his themes which

saves them from being depressing in their sordid realism. Remorse, spiritual or spirituous, is not in him. His is a night out followed by no morning after. In Adriaen van Ostade, his true successor, we can mark the gradual change from caricature, well and truly presented with careful regard of lively action and forceful characterisation, to a soberer (and perhaps less interesting) enjoyment of beauty external to the theme itself. Where Brouwer had been content to emphasize the rich colour of interior shadows, and to let drama emerge through vigorous design, van Ostade learned to make the whole light-scheme and arrangement of his pictures play their part in dramatic effect : and though, in his earlier work, his peasants and their actions are still the main *raison d'être* of his painting, as time goes on he demands a more contemplative approach, and aims at something almost like vastness, so that his figures become mere incidents in a scheme of light and shade. His rise in the social scale, if we may call it so, brings with it a touch of dullness—perhaps the dullness of the reformed rake ; for unlike Rembrandt, by whom he was surely influenced, he lacked the imagination to be both lively and lovely in his work.

As in portraiture and in landscape painting, so also in the treatment of genre, Rembrandt stands alone among the Dutch painters in his power to invest the commonest scene with the atmosphere of romance, and to give to his figures individuality and vitality to such a degree as to make each one of his genre subjects, not a mere impersonal generalization, but a human document. Paradoxically, by making beauty subservient to character and incident, he intensifies its power over the imagination ; for it becomes an integral part of the message of the picture. The “Sweeper” of the Hermitage collection is a case in point. The arresting beauty of the scheme of light and shade is inseparable from the personality of the child herself, and it is that personality, rather than the beauty of the manner of its presentation, that haunts the memory ; yet the picture is not a portrait of the child, but beauty made more memorable and more penetrating by childhood’s unconscious charm and pathos. It would scarcely be fair to classify his biblical subjects as genre painting, but, once we divest ourselves of their historical association, that is what they are. The “Nativity” is, so far as its actual content is concerned, nothing but a group of peasants in a barn ; yet reverence and the sense of mys-



tery, mental and emotional states, are irresistibly conveyed in terms of quite material conditions of lighting and of composition. It is nothing but the divine light of imagination, the light that never shone into the heart of a Brouwer or an Ostade, that works the miracle.

This power of Rembrandt to refine the spirit of common life, while retaining its coarse envelope, was unique, for though, with the growth of their material prosperity, the Dutch bourgeoisie aimed at refinement, it was in the main a refinement only of externals. The portrait painters, those necessary lackeys of respectability, became a little less obvious in their cataloguing of fine clothes, a shade more interested in character, but the painters of incident, and side by side with them, the painters of still-life, of the mere apparatus of material prosperity and pleasure, always held their own ; and a queer streak of elementary materialism, which it would be unkind to call coarseness, running through Dutch life even in the days of its most self-conscious and complacent respectability, keeps the successors of Brouwer and van Ostade well employed. Metsu and Steen are its principal exponents, and even in such widely differing painters as Honthorst and Wouverman, it comes to us in flashes here and there. Just because it is quite natural and honest, it never revolts us, but raises the same indulgent smile that we can accord to Brouwer's brawling boers and their sadly unattractive lady-loves : and it is rather amusing to reflect that, even where it is no longer apparent, it underlies the refinement of such artists as Terborch, de Witte, and de Hooch, painters as these are also of material delights. For the smoky inn, they substitute the sunlit parlour, for noisy squabbling, polite conversation, furs and velvet for fustian and moleskins, wine in tall glasses for mugs of beer, and rather ponderous dalliance for the less delicate flirtations of their franker forbears ; that is all. Rude or polite, it is the same record of things seen, and rendered beautiful, not by any attempt to exalt them beyond their plain material worth, but by the innate perception of the Dutch artist of the universal beauty of light and colour, and of the narrative value of fine draughtsmanship and forcible design. Yet, while the craft remained mechanically perfect, and was even carried to a miraculous finish in detail and surface, the true qualities of greatness—sincerity, the intimate touch with life, sensibility to, as opposed to mere observation of, the beauty of atmosphere, light and shadow, harmony of colour, nobility of

design—faded steadily away, leaving behind them only competent but commonplace illustration.

Nicolas Maes, the pupil of Rembrandt, caught something of his master's imaginative vision, but only in much the same degree as a polished surface may reflect the sun. Though the "Spinning Woman" does indeed recall Rembrandt's "Sweeper," the after-thought that follows is that of surprise that it should have done so ; for while Maes has captured some of the adventitious beauty of light and shadow in the subject, and has given it a touch of rather superficial pathos, there is no mystery, no wonder, none of that interpenetration of the human and the aesthetic aspects, which constitutes so large a part of the genius of Rembrandt ; while, in such subjects as "The Eavesdropper" (lately in the Six Collection) and the "Idle Servant" (N.G.), he sinks to a level of loquacious narrative which obscures the very real beauties of his composition and handling of light. We are already a world away from the quiet happiness and sober unity of de Hooch's "Card Players" or his "Linen Press" (lately Six Collection), and from the sumptuous dignity of Terborch's "Letter" (H.M. the King), and immeasurably distant from Vermeer's "Ear-ring" (Berlin).

Gerard Dou, too, for all that luminous shadow and delicate colour can do for him, for all the infinite riches in a little room that craftsmanship carried to extreme lengths can give, is a little master in every sense : and though he offers us honestly every scrap of beauty of fur and feather, of stone and metal, of wrinkled visage and lively incident, that his keen eyes could see and his unshaking hand set down, his work is curiously uninspired by any joy save that of its production : and his imitative followers, of whom the most noteworthy is Willem Mieris, can add little of their own, save a rather less insistent craftsmanship—a negative addition, indeed—to the story of this aspect of Dutch art. Gottfried Schalken's aptitude for candle-light subjects, is little more than a clever trick, and his brief excursion into the imitation of Rembrandt reveals the shallowness even of his one claim to recognition.

### §

It is a relief to turn to the far more humanly sympathetic, though frankly limited outlook of Terborch, who was, as nearly as was possible

for a Dutchman of the 17th century, a painter of aristocrats and an aristocrat among painters. He is seldom lively—liveliness in Holland was always dangerously near to coarseness—indeed, he is generally aggressively refined ; but at least he never reduces his human beings to mere lay figures. He will paint for you portentous peg-top persons, like his own self-portrait as a Councillor of Deventer, and on the other hand, in the same breath, he can produce a delicious child portrait like that of Helene van den Schalke. Both hang in the Rijks Museum at Amsterdam ; they are alike in composition, they are alike in detached quietude, but the one is brilliant in technique and dull as self conscious dignity can make it, and the other reduces technique to its simplest terms and is alive with sympathy and dramatic quality ; yet both are equally living. It seems quite likely that in this charming portrait of a child we may trace a reminiscence of Spain, even of Velazquez himself : for Terborch was a travelled artist, and his natural bent towards dignity was one calculated to make him, more than any of his contemporaries, susceptible to the Spanish influence which he encountered during his stay in that country.

However, Terborch was primarily a painter of mildly interesting subject pictures. His "Paternal Remonstrance" at Amsterdam, "The Letter" in the collection of His Majesty the King, and many another study of refined Dutch domestic life, rest almost entirely upon their exquisite appreciation of values of light and shadow and texture, and it is only occasionally, as in the portrait of Helene van den Schalke, that we see clearly the delicate humanity of the painter's outlook. It is easy enough to dismiss the majority of Dutch painters as extraordinarily skilful in the rendering of material facts, but to do this would be to overlook their intense enjoyment of those facts not in themselves but in their relation to the human element. Terborch is of course a far smaller painter than Rembrandt, but in his kind and degree, he is every bit as thorough, every bit as honest, and every bit as convincing. He did not bite so deeply into life because life did not bite so cruelly into him, and his placid contentment is the very antithesis of Rembrandt's restless imagination. Where Rembrandt is dynamic, Terborch is static, and where Rembrandt is mysterious, Terborch is simple, for the reason that Rembrandt sought after the springs of action, while Terborch was content with the results



of activity ; and where Rembrandt sought for meanings of things, Terborch was quite content that they should be as they were. This artistic complacency of Terborch results however in extraordinary brilliance of perception in rendering the purely material aspect of persons and things, and there is in his work a quality of repose which is to a certain extent lacking from the more mature Rembrandt. While we may be inclined, at a superficial glance, to be contemptuous of the meticulous rendering of silk and satin, fur and velvet, we are bound in the long run to come back to the conclusion that these things, being part and parcel of life as Terborch saw it, were really essential to his art, and not merely an exemplification of his craft ; and if we pass from so exquisite a handling of interior light and rightly placed colour as his " Concert," to the supremely inspired artistry of Vermeer, we are able to see how short are the bridges which span the differences between all the greatest and most typical of the Dutch artists of the middle of the 17th century.

To attempt to compare Terborch, or his peer in quiet and satisfied sumptuousness, de Witte, with Jan Vermeer would be like attempting to compare the harvest moon with the midsummer sun at noon. Both are beautiful, but whereas the first is a reflected glory, that is to say, merely the reflection of the supreme contentment of a proud and prosperous community, the other is the expression, in terms of material things, of a quality far beyond that of mere quietude, the quality of an eternal quietism. Vermeer started life with something of the sumptuous outlook of Terborch. He loved magnificent colour and bold composition, but he learned very early the power of restraint. From " The Young Courtesan " at Dresden to " The Girl reading a Letter " in the Rijks Museum at Amsterdam is really not a very long stride, in so far as the simple and unadulterated rendering of things seen is concerned, but the psychological distance between them is immeasurable. Vermeer started life as a painter of boldly decorative genre ; he crowned his life's work as an infinitely reticent painter of purely aesthetic contentment, derived from surroundings that to the majority of us would have been utterly uninspiring.

The genius of Vermeer is supreme. It has no parallel in any other age or country. It consists in rendering with literal and unimaginative accuracy conditions to which he himself brought ecstatic vision. The

grey afternoon light of a Dutch interior is a very beautiful thing, and if we can divest ourselves of any consciousness of the objects upon which, in Holland of the 17th century, it was wont to fall, we can easily see that imaginative colourists could make of it the basis of an enthralling theme ; but that there should have been found in Holland of the 17th century, a painter who could represent that light in its actual and uncontrolled surroundings, and yet retain its magic as light, is a gift from Heaven. With one exception, his "Portrait of a Girl" in the Mauritshuis, it is doubtful whether Vermeer ever painted a beautiful woman, and even the beauty of that girl—one cannot help feeling—is largely the result of Vermeer's rendering of her ; yet he never failed to create an atmosphere of beauty about the objects that he painted. The compelling quality of the man lies just in this, that he was content with things as he found them, for the simple reason that every single thing that he saw came to him in the form of a great discovery. It is easy for those who live in a climate which presents to them a constant pageantry of colour, to develop into an artistic tradition that aspect of their world, but the man who, living in conditions by no means so obviously beautiful, found in those conditions material for the revelation of entrancing beauty where probably few of his fellow men suspected that it existed, has the right to be regarded to all time as a national genius : and that is the place which Vermeer holds and always must hold in the history of Dutch painting. Between him and Rembrandt the difference of genius lies in the fact that where Rembrandt was universal, Vermeer was Dutch, that where Rembrandt was concerned with souls, Vermeer was concerned with glimpses of heaven upon earth, and the swift and fiery genius of the one, set side by side with the slow and contemplative genius of the other, completes the gamut of possibility of the Dutch genius in the art of painting.

## §

Beside these two stands de Hooch, and yet even while we recognise that the spiritual imagination of Rembrandt and the material imagination of Vermeer have no counterpart in de Hooch's aesthetic materialism, we have to admit that if de Hooch had never painted, the world would have been ignorant of an aspect of beauty of which the bare facts must have been familiar to every Hollander of his time ; it is, further,

somewhat interesting to observe that it is the School of Amsterdam which supplies to us the warmly human element in art, and that it is rather to Delft or Leyden (as we shall see later) that we must turn for the more philosophically abstract aspects of beauty in painting ; for de Hooch is above all things intimately human. Broadly speaking, his work can be divided into two main groups, the earlier phase in which his keen and sympathetic sense of beauty is exercised upon comparatively common things—the brickwork of a house in afternoon light, the tiles of a courtyard with the sunshine streaming down a passage, and the familiar association of mistresses and servants, mothers and children, such as “The Courtyard of a Dutch House” (N.G. 835), “The Pantry” (Rijks Museum), or “The Linen Press” (Six Collection) ; and the later phase in which he seems to hunger after more refined settings and richer materials, as in “The Card Players” (H.M. the King), or “An Interior” (Rijks Museum), and seems in fact to be trying to better himself as a painter in the social scale by emulating the style of such painters as Terborch, whose associations from the beginning had been with clients of very exalted position : and though in his later paintings, we may regret the loss of freshness and of naïveté, which mark his earlier work, we cannot but admire the sensitive and receptive quality of the painter who was able to see that his own natural environment was not the only one which could appeal to him as beautiful. There is little enough in Dutch painting which can be marked down as having lain outside the painter’s own actual experience ; but to give him his due, he made the most of his limited range of material, and was compensated by versatility in observation for narrow provincialism of experience. He very seldom went beyond Holland for his subjects, but he knew his Holland very well indeed—from rich to poor, from dawn to sunset, from a bunch of tulips to a burgomaster. This universal interest is, however, not within the compass of any one human being, and insomuch as there is scarcely a single phase of Dutch life of the 17th century which is not represented in its painting, it is not to be wondered at that there is ample material for an immense variety of painters, as well as ample opportunity of variety of outlook for each individual painter.

## §

It is almost impossible to divide the painters of Holland strictly into



classes under the heading of portraiture, genre, landscape or whatever it may be, for all of them overlap, and even a painter so firmly fixed in the modern popular outlook as a landscape painter, as Aelbert Cuyp, was in fact a commandingly solid portrait painter and a singularly gifted painter of still-life. In a greater or less degree, this variety of interest is a characteristic of every accomplished Dutch painter of the 17th century, though, indeed, all Dutch painting has at the back of it a still-life quality. Apart from Rembrandt and Hals, who stand entirely by themselves, no Dutch painter had a deeper conception of beauty than that presented by the actual appearance of things seen, and therefore when any of them paints, whether it be a town or a tub, he paints with exactly the same essential outlook, that of the visual appearance of the subject.

Superficially this results in a sameness which has induced some people to think of the Dutch painters as lacking in individuality. But they are alike only as all sheep are alike to anyone but their shepherd. The differences between them are small, but clearly defined when once they are detected: and while it is obvious that it was from Vermeer and de Hooch on the one hand, and from Terborch, Maes and Dou on the other, that the main characteristics of the later 17th century genre painters were derived, the permutations and combinations in which these characteristics are exhibited provide variety enough. If Gabriel Metsu learned his finished craft, and his use of heavily contrasted light and shadow from Dou, he combined with it something of the richness of Terborch, a liveliness that is a more refined and subtle version of the garrulity of Maes, and a pervasive quality of light that reminds us of de Hooch. He missed greatness only by a very little, and in versatility he went beyond the majority of his contemporaries. His life was short, but his mind was quick and his eyes were keen: and every now and then he had a flash of vision which revealed to him the pure beauty of cool light as Vermeer himself saw it; he was no imitator, for even when he reminds us strongly of another painter, he is unmistakably himself. "The Forge" in the National Gallery (2591), the "Sick Child" at Berlin (Huldschinsky Collection), and Lord Northbrook's "Intruder," even the rather trivial "Drowsy Landlady" in the National Gallery (970), present significant aspects, not merely of their respective types of subject, but of one man's mentality and point of view.

So too, Emanuel de Witte is not quite an echo of Terborch nor of de Hooch, nor a mere reminiscence of Vermeer. The stateliness of the first, the intimacy of the second, and the quietude of the third, are all here in a greater or less degree, but de Witte's own contributions are a love of large spaces and a sheer joy in complexities of diffused and reflected light, in high but tender scales of neutral colour : it is this natural bent that made him a painter of great church interiors, whose whitened walls and pillars gave him full scope for his love of subtleties of tone, and the same personal note creeps into his portrait groups and the shadowed space behind his single figures, making them his own.

Even Ochtervelt, who is so nearly Terborch in little, has some of the liveliness that is so much more marked in Metsu, and some of Vermeer's interior space : and he adds to these a cheerful note of triviality that is quite his own. It is certainly not frivolity, but if he had been a Frenchman, that is what it would have been. He is very nearly dainty, and that is in itself enough to make him singular among Dutchmen.

## §

In fact, the difficulty in studying these painters of the light and air in which Holland lived and moved and had her being, is, that they all overlap each other, but never coincide precisely ; so that we are led on insensibly from one to another, till intimate genre merges into the space and light of great interiors, and then goes out of doors : and before we know where we are, the miracle of Vermeer's " View of Delft," and his " Little Street in Delft " is upon us. When that has happened, we are trembling on the brink of landscape painting, and, as though to make confusion worse confounded, we are confronted by the fact that the painter, who, in one aspect of his work, goes right back to the spirit of the old peasant genre of Brouwer and van Ostade, and in another exhibits the domestic intimacy of de Hooch, while in command of composition and of colour he is the better of all save Rembrandt and Vermeer, was the pupil of a painter of land- and seascape, J. van Goyen, whose colour sense was almost monochromatic, and whose composition was spatial rather than constructional.

This painter, Jan Steen, had a mind of his own, sensitive vision, and a dignity which survives the coarseness and stupidity of many of his fash-

ionable subjects : very likely a coarse subject amused him as much as it amused his patrons, but all subjects alike were to him vehicles of beauty, and that of an order more complex and subtle than mere space and light. As a bold colourist he stands alone among Dutch painters, and in the matter of composition, both of line and mass, he approaches the very heights of abstract beauty and of significant design. No subject was too commonplace, too stereotyped, or too sordid to be the vehicle of beauty in balance, in rhythm and in colour harmony : by a boldness of construction, unerring in its completeness, he could give a new distinction to the most hackneyed subject ; and at the same time he lost nothing of cheerful humanity or of sympathetic insight. In his hands, the favourite theme, "The Doctor's Visit" (Hermitage) is vigorously narrative, even jocosely explanatory ; and, none the less, in colour, in subtle emphasis of line and balance of the masses, it displays a certainty, a confidence, far beyond that of any of his contemporaries, even beyond that of any other Dutch painter save Rembrandt himself. Yet more, his "Bad Company," in the Louvre, displays the same strength, the same exquisite understanding of the meaning of line, the same enjoyment of the monumental quality of a fine design. With all these virtues, Steen might be forgiven if he had lacked delicacy, and if the tenderer aspects of light and colour had found in him no response. But in the "Young Woman at her Toilet" (H.M. the King), there is added to solid, almost solemn composition, and to intimate liveliness of movement, an envelope of light-drenched atmosphere that reveals the poet in the painter.

It is not often that we are able so completely to surprise the inner refinement of Jan Steen, but glimpses of it are frequent, as in the exquisite "Girl Eating Oysters" (Six Collection). "St. Nicholas' Day," too, full of incident without over-crowding, explicit in its story without becoming either garrulous or commonplace, has all the distinction that a clear and delicate atmospheric tone can give it ; indeed there is a touch of incongruity in the association in Steen, of a mentality veering between bourgeois robustness and peasant grossness, and an aesthetic sensibility suited to other and far more gracious themes. It is as though, in defiance of time and race, Brouwer and Chardin had been rolled in one to make a genius.

But, after all, it is not so very surprising. Beauty is noble, however



low the company it keeps : and the thing that gives Dutch painting its abiding hold on the taste of generations far removed from the life it illustrates so faithfully and with so little imaginative gloss, is the steadfast hold of its creators on beauty wherever it could be found in common things, or created out of common material. This beauty, as the Dutchman saw it, was not part of the things themselves, which were transitory, even momentary, in their appeal ; it was a constant condition, either self-evident or to be discovered, which neither entered into, nor was disturbed by, human activity of any kind. The only Dutchman who ever conceived of any interpenetration of the two was Rembrandt, but he, conversely (and perversely, perhaps) made that interpretation the mainspring of his art. Even his landscape painting is full of this symbolic quality, however far it may seem removed from the influence of human thought or action.

## §

In Rembrandt's landscapes, it is always the surprise of dramatic emphasis, as sudden as it is fleeting, that is the source of his inspiration. The slightest scrawl shows this as clearly as the most finished painting, and what appears, in a picture like "The Bridge" in the Amsterdam Museum, to be a carefully thought out studio effect, is in fact nothing more than the rendering, in the more elaborate medium, of an impression instantaneously seized in the first sketch. It is no after-thought or studio-trick, but the primary purpose of the picture. Even more, the "Great Landscape with a Ruin on the Hill," at Cassel, develops the same theme, and actually embodies the lesser composition in a greater one. This is what makes it so difficult to draw any line between Rembrandt's treatment of genre and his treatment of landscape, for although it was for the most part suppressed by obvious limitations in his portrait painting, it is the dramatic aspect of every subject alike which attracts him, and the descriptive quality in his painting which is seen in embryo in the "Lesson in Anatomy" is equally demonstrated in "The Nativity," with its tremendous contrast between concentrated light and diffused shadow, and in "The Bridge" or "The Windmill." The intermediate phase is exemplified in "The Woman taken in Adultery" (N.G.). In the latter, the massive foreground and the shimmering background constitute two

foils for the quiet concentration of a draughtsmanship and compositional opposition upon the figures of the Christ and the kneeling woman. The thing as a whole is pure drama, and so is "The Bridge." The one is human drama, and the other is cosmic drama. That is the difference. That is why, although it might be quite possible to divide the work of Rembrandt into portraiture, landscape and genre, it is not in the least necessary to do so ; the same Rembrandt is behind them all, the same principles actuate all three aspects of his art.

For this reason, we may follow out the story of Dutch landscape painting without considering Rembrandt as a landscape painter at all ; for although his influence may be traced again and again, it is the influence of his material sight, more than of his spiritual vision, and so had no more than a technical and superficial reaction upon his contemporaries and successors. To the Dutchman, generally speaking, landscape was just another vehicle for the expression of his sense of the material beauty of the world he lived in, and, with very rare exceptions, he did not go beyond his native boundaries to find that beauty, for it would have been the same (only rather more difficult to find) in any setting that the wider world could offer him.

## §

It is in Dutch landscape, however, that we find the key to the Dutch sense of beauty, and to its peculiar detachment from persons and incident, that quality of enveloping universality which has already been defined as its abiding strength : for Holland provides the painter with no outstanding forms, no overwhelming grandeurs of rock and mountain ; as landscape it offers, not structural, but spatial design. Apart from the towns, one stretch of country is much like another, and beauty comes and goes, at the whim of passing cloud and fleeting sunshine. In these vast expanses of flat land and unimpeded sky, painter and people alike could not but learn the lesson, that beauty is independent of the things of which, for a moment, it seems to be composed.

An interesting and immediate result of these conditions is that Holland gave the world its first true painters of the sea ; for, alternately a foe to be shut out, and an ally to be called in, the sea was part of the short and stormy history of Holland's freedom, and moreover, it was very like the

land, for both are flat, and both have sky above them : and in expanse and sky, in space and light, are all the springs of beauty. Whether these be confined in a beer-house, or, less closely, in a quiet home, whether they be enclosed between the houses of a street, or given all the countryside to play in, they remain the same in this, that from them comes all beauty in a Dutchman's eyes.

Therefore, strictly speaking, there is no hard and fast line to be drawn between landscape, seascape and "townscape," as they are handled by Dutch painters. Vermeer, with the "Little Street in Delft," led the way for de Hooch, with his sun-soaked courts and quiet gardens hemmed in on every side by houses. In these, structural composition is reduced to its very simplest terms, so as to give the fullest possible effect to spatial values and light in atmosphere. Action is slowed down almost to immobility, so that the human element may not introduce a distracting note of restlessness : and in Vermeer's "View of Delft" we see the final triumph of light and atmosphere over linear design : for though the architectural forms are truly rendered and pleasantly balanced, they are scarcely more, in interest, than a setting for the large, quiet procession of high skies, and the upward movement of light from scarcely broken waters.

Nor, for all their minute topographical detail and varied human interest, are the town pictures of Gerrit Berck-Heyde merely portraits of places. True, we can read his love of his native town of Haarlem in his rendering of its buildings and streets and squares : yet the lasting value of them is not sentimental, but aesthetic, and their purpose is not so much to represent as to reveal. The "Interior of St. Bavo, Haarlem" (N.G.) may be very interesting and, to us, even amusing, as a record of costume and custom, but to the painter it was mainly an adventure in light : and no one can see the "Town Hall, Haarlem" (N.G.) without thinking ever afterwards of Haarlem as a very peaceful place where it is always afternoon.

Jan van der Heyden, though a lesser man, does not base his appeal wholly upon the minute and accurate finish of his architectural painting : sunlight and air count for much, for example, in the "Westerkerke" in the Wallace collection, and no less in the more elaborately composed "Oude Delft Canal," lately in the Six Collection, and the "Dutch



Canal," in the Rijks Museum. True, these town-painters have lost much of the true open-air feeling of Vermeer and de Hooch, and of the genius for large interior space and light that kept P. J. Saenredam and Emanuel de Witte distinguished even when they were most topographical; but the decline is rather in perception and rendition than in intention. Even to the least and dullest of Dutch town-painters, the town was still a form of landscape painting, a vehicle for the expression of his enjoyment of spacious light.

## §

However far we go back, even to Geertgen tot Sint Jans, Jan Scorel and Lucas van Leyden, we find the same dominating influence of light at work. The great church-interior of Geertgen at Amsterdam (Rijks Museum), the "Allegory of the Passion," is not essentially different in this respect from a picture of a church interior by de Witte; and the background of Jan Scorel's "St. Mary Magdalene," in the same collection, for all the fantastic unreality of its rock and mountain shapes, is no mere ornamental background, but an aerial setting for the figure of the saint: and while it is quite true that technically Flanders bulked large in the 17th century development of landscape painting in Holland, the Dutch sense of landscape was already developed upon lines entirely its own. Hercules Seghers, as Mr. Collins Baker has pointed out, wandered far and wide in search of landscape subjects, and was no stranger to Italian mountain forms or to English contours of hill and plain; but for all this, it was the recession of great spaces one beyond another that captured his imagination, and inspired those remarkable etchings in which humanity, if its existence is acknowledged at all, shrinks to insignificance in the great scheme of design.

Jan van Goyen, without so varied an experience, found variety enough in Holland's land and sea. Though it may be that time has lent to his pigments a sombre quality he never meant them to possess, it is quite clear that neither colour nor form was his primary preoccupation: in such a picture as his "Landscape with a riven Oak," in the Rijks Museum, the oak seems at first to dominate the composition by its powerful drawing and concentrated illumination; but it, and the figures beside it, are in fact no more than a foil for the immensity of distance that

stretches out beyond them, and in this there is no structural balance of masses, but simply gradation of light to the horizon, and thence into the high and overhanging sky. In the same way, the "Valkenhof at Nymwegen," in spite of the noble gravity of design and colour of the castle, and the vigorous balance of its massive forms by the dark and crowded barge set against the clearest passage of light in the whole picture, the real reason of the work is the light itself, which surges forward and upward from the distance over the waters and up into the sky.

In his "View of the Maas at Dordrecht," he carried us a step further still, for here, though the sky line is broken by towers, houses, mills and the sails of ships, from one end of the picture to the other, the light subdues all these forms in a steadily increasing degree as they recede into the distance, and the dark masses of boats in the foreground are so placed as to emphasize this recession to the utmost, while, from the point of greatest saturation of light, the huge scheme of the mounting clouds begins, and carries the eye upwards and forwards. The whole composition is one of movement in space, superimposed upon a very slight and simple structural design.

Even simpler are his sea pieces, low in tone and almost colourless, with their subtle range of greys and browns, and steely lighting : for in these, the turn of a wave and the slant of a mast have to do duty for all linear design, and the eye is forced to obey the directional impulse from near to far and from low to high, as the only source of ordered composition. The impression received is one of restless but purposeful austerity.

### §

In other words, we find in Dutch landscape and marine painting, the quality which found no other artistic outlet, save in the roystering vigour of the peasant genre, and, exceptionally, in the portraiture of Hals and Rembrandt, namely, the quality of imaginative dynamism. In landscape and marine painting alone does the Dutch painter's own personality get the better of the thing seen to the point of unconscious and insistent self-revelation. To Philip de Koninck, for example, beauty in landscape meant the stretching away of fields and trees to illimitable horizons, the fading of colour to indefinite haze, the drifting of high skies along great journeys through space. Cloud forms are to him as real as, and more

interesting than the forms of men and animals, which seem to be introduced rather to emphasize the vastness of their surroundings than for any importance of their own ; and he indulged himself with canvases larger than the common run, in order to find room for his wide outlook on the world.

Salomon van Ruysdael found delight in quiet tone enlivened by changing and flickering light among trees stirring in the breeze. Lively grouping of figures and cattle and beautifully composed masses of rustic architecture complete his "Halt by the Wayside," in the Rijks Museum, while his little "Fishing in the River," in the National Gallery, for all its quietude, depends almost entirely, for its rather elusive charm, upon the upward movement of the light from left to right.

Salomon's nephew, Jakob van Ruisdael, presents, with van Everdingen, the problem of what the Dutch landscape painter might have become with wider experience than his own rather monotonous fatherland could offer him. For, whether Ruisdael did or did not travel in Norway, it is certain that van Everdingen did so ; and the reaction upon these two Dutch artists of entirely non-national landscape conditions is so vigorous, and produces in them so strong a sense of the dramatic quality of natural landscape forms, that we cannot resist the conclusion that the Dutchman of the 17th century had really arrived at conscious self-interpretation through the medium of landscape painting. Nothing could be more un-Dutch in subject, nor more completely Amsterdam in treatment (so far as mere technique is concerned) than the "Norwegian Landscape" of Allart van Everdingen in the Rijks Museum. In its concentration of central lighting, its deft distribution of high lights outside this central area, and its literal yet sympathetic rendering of forms, it is quite normally Dutch : but in its subtle echoing of the main architectural forms by the natural rock forms of the background, it is emphatic, and even dramatic, in its statement of a personal outlook ; and in the same way, whatever Jakob van Ruisdael attacks he makes essentially his own. Though his tree-forms, his torrents, his rocks, his lowering skies, are manifestly conscientious renderings of things seen, he has seen them with none but his own eyes. We may arrive at finding the same formula in all his pictures, but at least that formula is his very own. His is the austere vigour of van Goyen, but with something added—a note of



tragedy, of solemnity merging into gloom, which could never have been content with the wide flat spaces and big distances of Holland as a medium for its expression. Where Seghers and Koninck could find complete satisfaction in huge distance, Ruisdael needed a "close-up" for the expression of his emotional state; and whether in the "River-scene with a Mill," or the "Winter," in the Rijks Museum, or the "Rocky Landscape with Torrent" (N.G. 987), one of many such subjects in the National Gallery, the same emphatically dramatic spirit is always present.

Beside these painters, Jan Both seems tame and stereotyped at first; but this is because his is a quieter and more purely aesthetic outlook. He neither merely symbolises a state of mind, nor merely represents an actual scene. To all that he paints he gives a certain deep contented glow. It may be that his Italian experiences gave him a slightly more conventionalized feeling for colour than was common among Dutchmen; but whatever the cause, he was certainly in less direct contact with nature than almost any other Dutch landscape painter. It is not merely a matter of a personal liking for warm tones of light, for in Aelbert Cuyp we have the perfect painter of golden eventide, and yet as literal and direct an observer as all Holland could show; it seems to be rather a touch of aesthetic sophistication, a very difficult thing for a Dutchman to carry off successfully; and for all the beauty of colour that it makes possible, it results in a kind of formal stuffiness of atmosphere, which places Both definitely in the second rank, together with Karel du Jardin and Nicolas Berchem, and any and every other Dutchman who ever meddled with classicism.

Yet into what rank they might have sunk, without the sense of order which Italian influence gave them, it is difficult to guess, for there are instances which serve to show that a painter may have a genuine love of landscape, with little power to organize its elements into a work of art. In the work of such a painter as Wynants, for example, an elaborately artificial composition in terms of lines and masses and isolated forms supplies all the structure of his pictures; their detail betrays a lack of concentration upon a single aspect of nature, and there is in them little or no light-consciousness at all. For all their spaciousness, his landscapes are always rather overcrowded, and they lack a main motive, a dominant emphasis from any one particular point of view.

The very opposite is true of van der Neer, whose passion for moonlight, and for the sombre colour-scheme that it implies, intensified his susceptibility to the constructional value of masses : and to these characteristics he added a remarkable appreciation of the pictorial value of cool and penetrating tones of light. Very loosely, he may be called a romantic landscape-painter ; what is really more important, from the point of view of the historian of landscape painting, is his remarkable power of binding together apparently isolated passages of form into an unalterable composition, for in this he forms a link between the unerring patternism of Pieter Brueghel and the atmospheric unity of John Crome.

## §

It is difficult, at the present moment of critical drift, adequately to appraise the landscape painting of Meindert Hobbema. A generation that prides itself upon having discovered El Greco, and is willing to accord to Vincent van Gogh a place among the world's great painters, naturally finds some difficulty in endorsing the verdict of the great English landscape painters of the early 19th century, to the effect that Hobbema was a divinely inspired interpreter of the unadulterated countryside. We may perhaps correct our diffidence, by the reflection that El Greco was a great expressionist long before the term expressionism was coined as a synonym for egotistical eccentricity, and that the undoubted greatness of van Gogh lay rather in his desire, than in his ability, to express himself in paint : and that, first and last, Hobbema is in fact the true forerunner of the greatest of all English landscape painters, and the first and most sincere of all impressionists, John Constable.

In short, what Salomon van Ruysdael foreshadowed, Hobbema made into a commonplace of beauty. That the most recent critics see the commonplace and overlook the beauty is their fault, not his. His groves of trees alive with shifting light, his meadows green beyond greenness with their wealth of verdure, are brought down within the compass of a canvas by a genius that could not only see the most accidental beauty, but could also use it to the most ordered purpose. It is not in realism, but in composition, in pure picture building, that Hobbema led the way for modern landscape painting. He could see what it was that he wanted to pass on, and so subtly, so directly could he eliminate all inessential inci-

dent, as to leave upon his finished canvas only what mattered to his purpose, with so little advertisement of the skill that went to the making of the picture, as to make it difficult for us to realise that what he tells us was not self-evident at the outset of his task. Only Constable, among all his successors, had the same true gift. Neither one nor the other thrusts himself upon us as the interpreter of nature to his whim ; but each gives us Nature as he chose to see her, and in no other way.

The "Avenue at Middelharnis" is the classic and, moreover, the isolated and final expression of what Hobbema means to the history of landscape painting. In that picture, the upward drift of cloud and the downward drift of light, from the one starting point of the small red roof upon the left, is the whole motive of the picture, actuated by the rigid rectilinear structure of the landscape. Here are van Goyen, Vermeer and Cuyp in one, and the net result is a world's masterpiece of landscape painting. But if we take a dozen of his earlier works, and, having overcome the first sharp disappointment at their literal, juicy joy of greenness and of moisture-laden light, begin to analyse the masterly understanding of essentials which underlies their apparently easy, and even commonplace, statement of obvious natural truth, we shall find that from quite an early point in his career, Hobbema had already mastered the art of seeing, and of the translation of things seen into terms of the narrow limits of his canvas, rather than that of mere transcription from nature by means of paint. In other words, whatever landscape, whatever group of trees and figures and houses, he may choose as the vehicle of his self-expression, it is a clearly-defined and personal pleasure that he seeks to share—the play of sunlight upon grass, the patterned dark-and-light of sunshine in a wood, the grave, the minuet-like quality of interplay between the lines of landscape features and the movement of the sky.

## §

If Hobbema was the forerunner of the English point of view in landscape painting, Jan Siberechts might almost claim to have foreshown the French sentiment which later so closely identified the peasant with the soil. In spite of a minute attention to the detail of individual forms, almost comparable to that of the lesser followers of the pre-Raphaelites—such men as Hughes and Brett—he managed to capture the atmospheric



envelope of his subject, and to make his figures, not merely incidental to, but the dominating factors of his composition ; his strong greens penetrated and held together by grey and grey-gold tone, are at once naturalistic and poetic, and a certain intriguing quality of emotionalism is vaguely suggestive of J. F. Millet or less vaguely of Bastien Lepage (whose "Noonday Rest" might almost be derived directly from the "Sleeping Shepherdess," at Munich). Siberechts lies somewhat off the main track of Dutch landscape painting, for in no other painter of his time is the true vein of pastoral sentiment so strongly marked ; and this, without any attempt at dramatic emphasis either in grouping, colour, or effect of light.

It is really rather remarkable, in fact, that the Dutch, whose opportunities of observing the enormous variety of colour afforded by high skies were second to none in the world, and were, in the majority of cases, their primary incentive to landscape painting, should have been on the whole, content to confine themselves in the matter of lighting to a comparatively narrow colour-scale, and that, moreover, the least spectacular.

## §

We may seek in vain, throughout Dutch art, for "the tattered banners of the dying sun, waving defiance at victorious night." Even when Aelbert Cuyp, in "The Large Dort" (N.G. 961), or in his "Landscape" (N.G. 53), paints the evening, drenched with golden sunlight, it is a dreaming gold, in which a quiet world sinks gently into rest. There is no room for drama in a setting of such immemorial peace. Indeed, Cuyp's quietude is far more real than that of Both, and his unidealized figures, his brass cans and his solid cattle, his stocky, well-groomed cavaliers and his stocky, well-groomed horses, have all the dignity which belongs to unadulterated and unaggressive truthfulness. There is a certain massiveness in all Cuyp's work, a monumental quality to which no other landscape painter of his time attained in quite the same way : for though Vermeer is even greater in his rendering of light itself, he never rendered, nor indeed sought to render, that alchemical transformation of a distant prospect of a whole town with its houses, its mills, and its churches, into solidified sunshine, which we see in the background of the "Avenue at Meerdervoort near Dordrecht," in the Wallace Collection. As a por-

trait painter, he was, if not greatly inspired at least much more than competent ; his subjects breathe placidity and quiet content, a little bovine, maybe, but always dignified, and set in roomy space and light : and as a painter of still life he found full scope for the peculiar static quality of mind which inspired him throughout.

It is difficult to determine exactly why the Dutch should have been the first among painters to bring cattle within the scope of painting as a main motive, both of interest and of design. Probably it was simply a single aspect of their omnivorous delight in pictures of everything that belonged to them and contributed to, or symbolized their national prosperity. However that may be, there is no doubt about their astounding pre-eminence in this by no means obviously inspiring field ; and moreover, they extended their artistic victories over every province of the animal kingdom. From the byre and the stable to the poultry yard, and thence to the aviary and the menagerie, is a short step. Cuyp found the beauty in the solid and angular, yet easy lines of a ruminating cow, and Paul Potter, as much by grouping and by contrast of forms as by mere anatomical precision, gave a colossal quality to the outline and modelling of a bull, set against the clear sky and finding a foil in the irregular and straggling forms of little trees ; and, when we have exhausted our admiration of the compelling reality, the absolute "cowness" of the cows in his "Milkmaid," in the Wallace Collection, we may well be surprised to find that the composition of the picture is splendid and memorable in its solid dignity of rising lines, and that its quality of atmospheric movement and pervasive light rank him among the great landscape painters.

Similarly, Philips Wouverman is, of course, of the company of animal painters, and there are few artists who have drawn horses in livelier or more engaging fashion. By his rendering of wayside scenes, and of horsemen at the tavern or the forge, he takes his place among the foremost of the genre painters ; the magnificent series of his works at Cassel, and among them, notably the "Shore Scene" and "Peasants resting," reveal him as a painter of space and sky and driving cloud to be reckoned with among the great Dutch landscapists ; and his battle pieces and his hunting episodes contain evidence of an instinct for decorative design surprising in a painter on so small a scale. Indeed, this decorative quality underlies a greater proportion of his work than would appear at

first sight, and the white horse that does duty so often as to have passed into vulgar tradition is more than a mere trick of repetition ; it is more often than not the pivot of a cunningly devised decorative scheme.

## §

No less, the whole school of Dutch marine painting after van Goyen is increasingly inspired by the sense of balanced design and pleasing disposition of masses. Of the two van de Veldes, Adriaen was almost as much a landscape painter as a marine painter, but whether it be his cattle piece at the Hague, or the marvellous shore scene—"The Beach at Scheveningen," in the Cassel Gallery, we cannot but feel that for all the value that he gives to atmospheric quality and cloud movement, or the movement of light through trees, he is ultimately relying upon the large disposition of his masses, irrespective of their literal content. Yet, in these, the aerial quality is still so strong as to be the predominant interest to the spectator, and it is not until we come to the work of the younger van de Velde, Willem, that we realize the full force of the growth of decorative instinct. Whether in rough seas or in smooth, the ships of Willem van de Velde manage to place their sails in perfect relation to the boundaries of the canvas upon which they are set, and no finer example of his spatial composition can be found than in his "Shipping on a Calm Sea," at the Hague, with its beautiful inspiration of rounded cloud forms between the angular forms of sails and the rigid upright lines of masts or its counterpart in the Wallace Collection (137). Jan van de Capelle, who is better represented in English galleries than in Holland, used the same material in much the same way, but with more delicacy of tone and atmospheric quality, and perhaps greater constructional feeling than van de Velde, as may be seen in the subtly graduated movement of colour across his canvas in the less spectacular but more compactly designed "Calm," (N.G. 2587). In the latter, dramatic force is obtained by the balance between the dark masses of the raft in the foreground, and of the ships in the furthest distance, and it is true that there is no lack of tridimensional space in these pictures ; but the fact remains that as wall decorations they are essentially distributions of bidimensional space in terms of colour. This is not to say that the Dutch marine school, with its many and subtly varied ex-



ponents, such as Simon de Vlieger, in whom there is perhaps more of the sea than of the studio, and Backhuysen, with his more vigorous rendering of the movement of shipping, has not the genuine spirit of the seas. It is there, but the general trend of the art of Holland towards the end of the century was steadily bringing it, in common with all other painting, within the scope of the still life point of view, and apart from portrait painting, and even to some extent to its inclusion, it is ultimately the still life attitude to aesthetic experience which triumphs in the Dutchman.

It had always been strong in him ; perhaps it has in a sense always been the underlying factor in all painting. It is certainly true that almost every great painter has now and then turned to it, sometimes, maybe, merely as a means of working out a problem, but more often for its own sake ; for when, as in Jan Scorel's wonderful "Family Group," in the Cassel Gallery, objects of still life are introduced as accessories, they seem to take command, and to impart their own character to all around them. The living become not less lively but much more still thereby, and strong constructive pattern and delicate passages of modelling and light and shade are thrown into immediate prominence.

Similarly, when a great master, such as Rembrandt or Vermeer, turns to still life, the result is always an illuminating commentary on his work in other kinds. Rembrandt's "Slaughterhouse," at Glasgow (one of the finest still-lives in the world), is an astonishing revelation of subtlety in colour-scale, as well as of vigorous decorative instinct in the painter. Vermeer's group of glass and plate and stoneware, fruit and sweetmeats, in a private collection in Brussels, tells more of the painter's close observation of light-containing shadow than many of the interior subjects in which he uses the knowledge as an accessory to a larger effect.

## §

Thus, while it is rather disappointing to find, among the Dutch still-life painters properly so called, an over rigid conservatism and a tendency to almost mechanical specialization, we may be consoled by the reflection that there is not a single aspect of Dutch painting into which their peculiar if narrow excellence does not enter. Indeed, we might almost be

forgiven for including among still-life painters the greater number of the later painters of refined genre thus absolving the still-life painter from the accusation of narrowness ; for Dou and Mieris, Metsu and van Tol, and many another of the kind, took at least as much pleasure in the arrangement and painting of inanimate accessories, and of the diverse textures of silk and velvet and fur, as in the rendering of the human face and figure.

Moreover, though each avowed still-life painter tended to choose his own particular branch of the subject, and to stick to it,—so that we have our flower- and fruit-painters, our game-painters, and our plate-and-glass-painters—these specialists were by no means merely imitative craftsmen ; if in all Dutch painting of genre, of portraiture, even of land and sea and town, there is something of the static finality of a still-life composition, there is also in all Dutch still-life painting, however highly specialized, something of animation of design and of movement of light. Indeed, this is so essential a factor in their character, that it is almost impossible to draw a hard and fast line between still-life and genre, for the two are mutually interpenetrative ; design is to the Dutch still-life painter so much more important than subject that one is almost tempted to believe that he became a painter of still-life mainly in order to indulge his pure decorative instinct, which was necessarily cramped by the preponderant human, topographical, or narrative interest of portraiture, landscape and genre ; for it must be remembered that Holland had deliberately cut herself adrift from the decorative tradition of the middle ages, and had held aloof almost wholly from that of the Renaissance, on political and religious grounds. She had declared so emphatically for materialistic and domestic art, as opposed to idealism and communal possession, that pictures became to the average Dutchman primarily personal possessions and only secondarily works of art. He bought a portrait for sentiment, a landscape for association, a genre piece for amusement ; and still-life came into being and increased and multiplied exceedingly, to satisfy his subconscious desire for abstract beauty as little as possible overshadowed by distracting considerations of sentiment or human interest.

Perhaps the only purely disinterested emotion in the Dutchman's temperament was his love of flowers ; for there is a hint of pride in the luxurious appurtenances of eating and drinking, in plate and silver, porcelain

and pewter. In food and drink themselves, in their profusion or their refinement, there is a rather gross satisfaction, a smacking of the lips to enter into rivalry with the feasting of the eyes ; and though van Aelst and Weenix, Heda and Claesz and Kalff, created beauty of light and shadow and colour and design out of these things, to those who bought them they had a subject-interest that took them out of the category of pure and unalloyed decoration.

Flowers were a different matter. The Dutchman really loved flowers for themselves, for all they could give him, which was their beauty and no more. He cultivated them with passionate delight, loving their colour, their form, their texture, and feeling the rapture of a creator in developing their beauty in his jealously tended garden. Almost it might be said that they were his one spiritual outlet in a world which in all else was utterly materialistic.

The Dutch flower-piece, then, is far more than a mere still-life. It is the common ground of the artist and the layman, the one kind of picture with regard to whose function painter and patron were wholly of one mind. So far from being a mechanical and stereotyped thing, it was actually the most completely free of all branches of Dutch painting from non-aesthetic considerations ; and furthermore, it was the one medium through which the painter could express his enjoyment, and display his mastery, of rich and varied colour. It is not surprising, therefore, that whole groups and families of Dutch painters clung, from generation to generation, to this one form of art, and that the demand for it was universal and constant.

As in genre painting, so also in still-life, Holland borrowed her beginnings from Flanders, and it was from Jan Brueghel the Elder and from Ambrose Bosschaert of Antwerp that she derived the method of flower-painting. Indeed, it was some time before it became possible definitely to differentiate between the two schools, for while Bosschaert left Antwerp for Middelburg, and later went to Utrecht, where he died, Jan Davidsz. de Heem (the son of David de Heem, who is recorded as the first Dutch flower painter), left Utrecht for Antwerp and remained there all his life, so that the contact between the two schools was long and intimate ; and it is certain that whatever the Dutchman may have had to learn in the matter of technique from the Fleming, as a lover of the "raw



material " of his chosen art, he had a long and worthy tradition at his back. We need only look at the weeds in the foreground of the picture of " Christ appearing to St. Mary Magdalene as a Gardener," by Jacob Cornelisz. Oostsanen (1480-1533), in the Cassel Gallery, to realise that, as a painter of plant forms, the Dutchman had little or nothing to learn from anyone, long before he entered the lists of still-life painting for its own sake.

The earlier work of Jan de Heem was comparatively timid in colour and simple in design, but it advanced rapidly in wealth and variety of colour, and gained still more in strength and elaboration of composition. For all its profusion, it is never garish or overloaded ; and, in his handling of masses of fruit, often in combination with a scarlet lobster as a dominant colour-note, there is a sober dignity which serves to mitigate the material aspect of the subject : as a pure flower painter, he had a wonderful control of his variegated forms, even when they seem most crowded, and evolved from them a precision and simplicity of pattern which makes them truly decorative in their final effect. No finer example of this phase of his work need be sought, than the " Glass Vase of Flowers," at Dresden, in which the fine lines of trailing grasses bind the whole design together. Nor is there any monotony or vain repetition ; the composition of " Fruit, Lobster, and Plate," at Cassel, and the " Fruit and Flowers " at Amsterdam present a vigorous contrast, in the conception of their general design and in the handling both of forms and colours, and, subtle though the differences may be between de Heem and his followers, and the contemporary group of which Evert and Willem van Aelst are the leaders, they are real and individual differences, as a study of Willem van Aelst's " Fruit Piece " at Cassel, with its more spacious management, will show immediately.

In view of the constant overlapping and interlacing of flower-, fruit-, and " table " painting, it is very difficult to consider them separately ; but in Jakob Walscapelle, we have perhaps the next continuator of de Heem's tradition, though, in depth of colour and in the solemn handling of shadows, he reverts rather to the quietude of Bosschaert. While Willem van Aelst was creating, in Italy and elsewhere, a wide foreign demand for Dutch still-life, and was tending steadily away from flower-work to wider and less purely aesthetic fields, the story of flower-painting was car-

ried on by his pupil Rachel Ruysch and by the van Huysums. Justus van Huysum, who began as a landscape painter, later took to flower painting, and his son Jan became the outstanding flower painter of the second half, as de Heem had been of the first half, of the 17th century, and his activities lasted well down into the 18th century. Working in a higher scale of colour, and with at once a greater emphasis upon individual forms, and a greater elaboration of composition, he narrowly escapes the charge of gaudiness and overloading : but there is in all his work a masterly control of general design, which redeems him from triviality or mere cleverness ; and his rather cold lighting, and the unsparing accuracy of his rendering of the smallest detail, give to his work a certain monumental, if rather monotonous, dignity.

It was not a Dutchman, but a Frankfurt pupil of de Heem, who gave the first decided warning of the decadence of the flower-piece. Abraham Mignon, who, having perfected his craft in Holland, returned to Germany, shows a marvellous command of his material, but in almost all his work there is an element of ostentation, and a tendency to multiply interests. In other words, he lacks restraint, and though so closely associated with the Dutch school, he is spiritually foreign to it.

By way of Willem van Aelst, with his increasing interest in fruit, game, and the trappings of the feast, we come to the painters of food. That the Dutchman's interest in eating was one incentive to the painting of such subjects, we need not doubt. Jan de Bray's very beautiful and dignified composition, "The Praise of the Herring," at the Hague, would be enough to prove it, if proof were needed ; and van Aelst, in passing on his skill to Weenix, gave it into no unworthy hands. For Weenix glorified food, and with it, the sportsman's pleasure in pursuing it. For him, a dead and sprawling hare, a heap of pheasants and partridges, the outstretched wing of a goose, are elements of design, inspirations to a splendid rhythmic movement of line and mass. At Dresden, the "Great Still Life with a Dead Hare" covers all the range of still life painting, from sculpture to a fallen feather, but the lines and masses are determined by the animal forms : and here, and in the "Country House," and "Game and Fruit" at Amsterdam, we can feel that Weenix was in the best sense a free painter, in that he takes his inspiration from the forms he paints, rather than that he imposes his will upon them to make them into pictures.

Far other was the process by which the quiet, ordered compositions of the "table-painters" came into being: for here was material, itself the work of artists, the plates and goblets and wine jugs of a richly furnished house, that could neither be painted solely for the beauty their creators had given them—for that would have been mere imitation—nor, however cunningly arranged, could make a perfect composition in themselves. Of all still-lives, these are the least purely decorative, at any rate from the painter's point of view. Much indeed depends on grouping and on line, but infinitely more on light and space. This, as we have seen, was the kind of still life painting at which Vermeer tried his hand: and when all is said and done, it is among the table pictures that we find the loveliest surprises of reflected and intercepted light and light-containing shadow, and of the soft and varied sheen of many textures, in all the range of still-life painting. We are back again in the debated territory, where the subject has a material appeal, while its treatment calls upon our love of beauty for itself alone.

Willem Klaasz Heda, of Haarlem, was the first and greatest of the line. His groups of goblets, and of glasses shining gently out of shadow, a plate or two, a crab (N.G. 1469), or some oysters, a white table cloth, and, often the clearest touch of colour in the whole design, a half-peeled lemon, are combined to make one tone poem after another, with an iteration that would be monotonous if it were not so subtly varied in the one thing that matters, the fall of light upon the skilfully grouped forms. Dresden has a classic example, "A Breakfast Table," in which there is at once an air of grave repose, and an intriguing suggestion of infinite possibilities of change. Very close to him, so close indeed as often to be confused with him, is Pieter Claesz, of Haarlem. It would seem, indeed, that he used the same material for his pictures: but there is a little loss of magic somewhere—perhaps no more than came of his being a follower rather than a pioneer.

The vigorous spirit of van Aelst found a larger handling and a more massive composition for these subjects, which the example at Dresden—a "Breakfast Table with Oysters"—well displays; but compared with either Heda or Claesz, he is lacking in delicacy and imaginative atmosphere: and the subdued but sumptuous glitter, and deep shadows, of the gold and silver plate of Willem Kalff of Amsterdam, with its obvious



and intentional echo of Rembrandt, comes rather as a surprise, for all its beauty and power, after the calm reticence of the Haarlem school. There is a superb example of his work at Amsterdam, in which the only note of simplicity is a Kiang H'si bowl ; but that is how Kalff saves himself from mere ostentation. He knows exactly how to introduce a foil for magnificence, and to combine the objects of his group in a composition so majestic as to make their rich decoration seem but a part of something greater than themselves.

These, then, are the principal types of still-life painting, that made the art of Holland famous beyond her borders in the 17th century, while her greatest portraiture remained unrecognized. Perhaps this is but an additional scrap evidence that in still-life was to be found the truest—or at any rate the most widely recognizable—expression of the basis of Dutch aesthetic sensibility.

## §

There is one other group of artists, however, who reveal even more clearly than any of these, the instinct for pure decoration which found so little outlet in Holland ; and these are the poultry painters, of whom Melchior de Hondecoeter is at once the type and master ; and in his works are found the boldness, the vigour, and the active rhythm that were in the nature of things outside the scope of painters of flowers and of breakfast tables, and only very rarely within the reach of the painters of dead game, though Weenix came very near to their achievement now and then.

The Dutchman was keenly interested in poultry and in water-fowl, and further, his trade with the east had aroused in him a lively curiosity with regard to exotic birds and animals : very much a naturalist, he delighted in rare breeds and crosses, and studied the actions and habits, the forms and colourings of his feathered stock much as he studied his flowers. Therefore, while it is true that poultry interested him as poultry, he enjoyed them also as pretty, lively and amusing things, and this without any emotional or sentimental disturbance—it would be difficult, perhaps, to foster a passion for a hen. So, they were an ideal subject for a decorative painter, for they gave him interesting, sometimes unusual and surprising form, animated line, and rich colour ; and he could dispose them as he pleased upon his canvas ; and moreover, by endowing them, as de

Hondecoeter often did, with heroic proportions, he could give to his finished design at once a commanding effect and a pleasing air of unreality. By far the greater part of Hondecoeter's birds are furiously in action, violently mobile. They call aloud for instant attention, wherever they be hung : yet always they fit into a great swinging rhythm, an overmastering design. What could be more superbly balanced than the " Fight between a Barndoor Cock and a Turkey Cock," what more commanding than the sweeping lines of the " White Peacock," in the Cassel Gallery ? And, yet again at Cassel, the " White Hen " is a composition which rises to grandeur in its massing of lines and forms to build up the central pyramid about which dark trees on the one hand, and beautifully graduated distance on the other are disposed in perfect equipoise.

As decoration, these works of de Hondecoeter are still unrivalled in their kind ; and if we feel inclined to smile at an art which found its highest decorative expression in the poultry run, we should bear in mind that a people debarred by one limitation or another, whether of religion or political prejudice, of social conditions in public and domestic life, or of sheer ignorance, from every viewpoint or opportunity upon which all previous decorative art had been built up, achieved no small thing when they found for themselves and applied to their own needs, a source of inspiration where no one had ever thought of looking for it before, in the garden and the larder, on the breakfast table and among the fowls.

## §

In short, a people whose materialistic preoccupations thrust the consciousness of beauty into the background of their lives, could only stop to seek it for its own sake in objects of comparatively little importance in themselves. Humour and sentiment, both quite sufficiently robust, and self-respect amounting very nearly to complacency, stood for them in the place of sympathy and passion and pride, and though they gained thereby in safety, doubtless they lost something in idealism. This is not to say that they were as a nation insensible to beauty ; they could never have produced so wonderful a century of painters, had that been so : but their appreciation of it in things whose material importance bulked largely in their minds was subconscious ; they loved their country, and its sunshine and grey skies were part of it, to be taken for granted ; they lived their

lives lustily, and if they had to choose between the beauty of the deep shadows among the rafters of an inn, and the beauty of a deep pot of ale, they had no mawkish hesitation ; the painter could have the shadows for his portion, and welcome ; and when they called in the portrait painter to hand down their pride of possessions, or of high office, or of good looks, to their posterity, they did not thank him for golden light nor for transparent shadow, nor for the reflection of philosophy or of romance from his own soul, but only for a record well and truly made, of what they looked like to the least inquisitive, the most respectful and the most envious of their fellow-citizens.

Dutch portraiture, therefore, is for the most part face-painting pure and simple. When we find that we are bound to look upon the Dutch portrait as a psychological study, we can be quite sure that we have to deal with the work of a painter who stands in this respect quite outside the natural and national line of development. There are few such portrait painters in Holland, but these few are the only ones who matter much to the outside world of painting. This may seem a contradiction in terms, but while we may admit the excellence of many of the Dutch portrait painters, we can concede supremacy only to a very few. Indeed, it would not be going too far to say that of all the painstaking and even brilliant face-painters of Holland, the only two who matter to the history of art are Hals and Rembrandt, and this is precisely because it is only Hals and Rembrandt who go beyond the very narrow limitations of the national habit in portrait painting, and who impress their own personality upon their subjects. Even so, these two supreme artists remain face-painters ; that is to say that they have no conscious aim beyond that of setting down upon canvas the living personalities presented to them by their subjects, and the reflection of their own personality upon these subjects is rather accidental than deliberate.

Lucas van Leyden is perhaps the first Netherlandish painter whom we can call Dutch ; and his portraiture is a rather uninspired record of features, though it is relieved by a kind of awkward vigour which is the natural ancestor of the Dutch characteristic of unromantic realism, and his feeling for landscape is rather sentimental than decorative. He is a Gothic artist, struggling hard against the obsession of classicism, and thus is the forerunner of the Dutch revolt against Latin influence, which gave



to art a new meaning and a new objective in North-western Europe.

Jan Scorel also shows signs of the loss of that conscious grace which became ultimately the outstanding characteristic of later Flemish art, and it must be confessed that he gained much in force thereby. After him, the beginning of distinctively Dutch portraiture is to be found in the work of Antonis Mor, who, after a highly successful but stormy career as portrait painter to King Philip II of Spain, found himself exiled from that aristocratic environment as a direct consequence of his own tactlessly democratic outlook. Antonis Mor was probably the first portrait painter in Europe to import into his rendering of his subject a liveliness which was rather a reflection of his own than of his sitter's personality. No portrait before his time ever presented that instantaneous quality, that representation of a moment of interest, of a flash of individuality, which are such marked characteristics of his finest work—the portraits of Johann Gallus and his wife, at Cassel, for example—and while in the light of the mass of Dutch painting, this is precisely the quality which we should expect the Dutch most to emphasize, it is singularly absent from the majority of their portraiture.

Dutch portraits of the 16th and early 17th centuries were for the most part wearily dull affairs, and we cannot blame King Charles I for his supersession of the Dutchman Mytens and of the Anglo-Dutchman Cornelius Johnson by Van Dyck, the natural courtier and the typical Fleming. The work of such painters of the 16th century as Marc Gheeraedts is indicative of the extreme limits of Dutch capacity in portrait painting at this period. There is an atmosphere of "nothing extenuate and naught set down in malice," which gives complete dullness and at the same time stimulates perfect craftsmanship.

If this were to be the best result of political and religious independence, one would feel that the rise of the Dutch Republic was wasted time, and that in the interests of art it had been better if Holland had gone the way of Flanders; but the surprising thing about the development of Dutch portraiture is the fact that the painters who commanded the least respect in Holland in their own day as citizens, are precisely those who have ultimately commanded the highest estimation as representatives of the vigorous temper of their day and generation; and while one must give to the 16th century Dutchmen unstinted praise as the pioneers of their craft,

we do not find until the 17th century is well advanced the full fruition of painting as a means of the expression of the fully developed national spirit.

## §

It is intensely interesting to observe that in fact, the painting of Holland is one of the very few arts in the whole history of human effort which move exactly contemporaneously with the events which inspired them, and we can no more separate Hals, Rembrandt, and Vermeer, Ostade, Steen and Mieris, from the conditions of the generations which produced them than we can separate effect from cause in logical sequence. They are the mirror of their age, as even Velasquez is not the mirror of 17th century Spain. Granting these narrow limitations of our study, we can confine our main interest to three portrait painters. The first of these is the painter already named, Antonis Mor, who was a native of Utrecht, but whose training brought him closely into contact with Italian traditions, although these had but little reaction upon his style. Holding an even balance between a half-assimilated Latinism and the more congenial influence of Holbein, and for the whole of his life working under the direct influence of Spanish patrons, Antonis Mor is rather a European than a Dutch painter, but none the less, he exercised upon his contemporaries and followers a very considerable influence—a softening influence it might be called—which helped those who followed him to mitigate the severity of their attention to irrelevant detail. His own work can scarcely be called Dutch, but its reactions were wide and important. It is scarcely conceivable that Franz Hals could have been precisely the brilliant technician and at the same time the subtly self-revealing artist that he was, if it had not been for the influence, direct or indirect, of the work of Antonis Mor.

Franz Hals, among portrait painters of the whole world, is probably the most completely self-revealing and at the same time the most brutally faithful of them all. In the work of Rembrandt we constantly find ourselves confronted with the personality of the painter, through the medium of his subject. When Hals paints a portrait, he paints a portrait of his sitter, but at the same time, he paints an unmistakable rendering of his own mood. This statement does not in any way contradict that which was made a few pages back, to the effect that the Dutch painter

was not concerned with psychological self-revelation. Before all things, Franz Hals was a painter. The strange obscurity of his earlier years (for we do not hear of him as a painter at all until he was over thirty years old), is, I think, simply due to the fact that during the whole of that long self-imposed apprenticeship, he was perfecting an entirely new and entirely individual method of craft, and it was not until that craft was mastered that he was able to command or even desired to command the smallest attention as a practising portraitist. All we know about him is that his earliest training was probably obtained at Antwerp, but there is no ghost of a shadow of the Flemish tradition about his painting. Indeed, his painting has no tradition about it. It is an entirely new creation. Moreover, it was so new a creation that for many years after his death, his work was entirely overlooked and despised. It did not fit in with any fashion, and indeed, to some extent, it violated the accepted rules of what a portrait should be, and so Holland would have none of it, after those whom his portraits represented were gone and the subtle humour and under-current of satire in their pictures was lost. It was not until these paintings reasserted themselves as masterpieces of paint-handling that they were able once more to command attention.

Now why was this? Why should a painter—why should any painter—who, to the modern critic, is manifestly a supreme master of his materials, sink into obscurity? Why should Hals, dissolute habits or no, have struggled during the whole of his life on this earth, a miserable man even though he was undeniably a supreme portraitist? It was for the reason suggested above, that the Dutchmen did not care twopence about great painting, but did care enormously for vivid representation, and that it is precisely for those to whom vivid representation matters enormously that interpretation through the medium of the painter himself is quite likely to be vigorously repugnant. I mean this—that a portrait by Hals either pleased its sitter or infuriated him. If it represented his personality as he liked to imagine himself, it did so with such vigour and crispness as to be a perfect joy. If it represented him in a light in which he had never occurred to himself before, and which was unplesant to him, it did so with equal vigour, for the simple reason that the painter had made up his mind, during that coldly analytical constructive process by which he built up his portraits, in so unmistakable and unalterable a



form as to carry conviction with it, even in the face of the pre-conceived notions of the sitter and his friends. To put it more simply, Hals told the truth about his subject as it appeared to himself, and could not modify it to please anybody, with the result that he displeased people as often as he pleased them.

It would of course be possible to describe this kind of portrait painting as impressionistic, or even in more modern terms still, as expressional painting. A much simpler word to use is to say that it was honest painting, and it is part and parcel of the Dutch heritage of honesty even to the point of brutality, that Hals should have reached the age of thirty years as a student of a craft which he was foredoomed to use to a comparatively unremunerative end. We know of course that "In making a bargain, the fault of the Dutch is giving too little and asking too much," but this is an accusation which cannot be brought against her greatest artists. They gave freely of themselves, but took little enough trouble, in all conscience, to discover whether what they were giving was what their patrons wanted. At their best, they gave all they had to give—themselves.

"The Laughing Cavalier" has made the whole world stand still. There is no more perfect example of bravura in paint. There is no more perfect example of the interpretation of character (from the painter's point of view, emphatically not from the sitter's point of view), there is no more facile composition, there is no more perfect balance of light and dark, of personal interest and of craft interest. It is the most magnificent rocket of portraiture that ever spread stars in the sky of human consciousness, but there it ends. It commands no sympathy.

On the other hand, when Hals got away from pure portraiture, and invested his sitter with a fictitious or generalised character, as in the case of "The Jester" (Amsterdam), he was able to give freer rein to his natural pleasure in bold characterisation, colour and composition, and divest himself of some of that bitterness which almost invariably appears in his portraits unless they be portraits of children. The result is surprising, for instead of giving us a clearer and more vigorous picture of the artist's mentality this aspect of his art actually results in a loss of power. The inference is that for all his originality, Hals was like every other Dutchman, tremendously dependent upon facts and correspondingly lacking in imagination. His subject pictures are nothing but portraits

robbed of their portrait quality and convey a faintly irritating impression of fancy dress and make-believe. This does not mean that every unnamed portrait presents these defects, for such pictures as the recently rediscovered "Man with the Jawbone of an Ass" and "The Laughing Man," in the Rijks Museum at Amsterdam, lack nothing of vigorous personality; but then they are studies of character rather than of mere externals, and so afford the painter the grip upon reality which he needs to find full expression. The same applies to the great majority of his studies of character, whether they are to be classed definitely as portraits or not. It is when we come to the vast portrait groups, such as those so fully represented at Haarlem, that we see Hals both at his most brilliant as a composer and in the throes of the bitterest boredom as a man. No portrait group could possibly be more cruel than that of the women Governors of the Almshouses, unless it be the corresponding picture of the male Governors of the same institution. There is not one of them whom he has spared the smallest indignity of their crass and complacent characters. One can only feel terribly sorry, as no doubt Hals felt, for the poor wretches that came under their governance, and it is precisely when Hals has the cruellest truths to tell that his brush is at its most brilliant.

So, in his own way, Hals stands alone, for differing, as Rembrandt differed, from all other Dutch portrait painters in his keen interest in character as opposed to mere externals, his interest was not so much curious as cynical, and the picture that he gives us of his contemporaries is tinged throughout with contempt. Free Holland, as he knew it, was smug, cold, and insolent. The only tenderness that he ever shows is in his painting of children. The only geniality he ever displays is towards the younger and more beautiful among his women subjects. There is a lovely woman very tenderly painted, and there is a roguish child rendered with delightful freshness, in the great family group in the National Gallery. He more than tolerated these two, but the others were merely subjects for his skill, and victims of his penetration.

## §

To turn from Hals to Rembrandt is a relief. We are no longer obsessed by the obvious brilliance of a technique which defies imitation even while it invites analysis, for Rembrandt's method is one which baffles

rather than invites investigation. It is impossible to say that there is anything particularly new about it, but it is equally certain that paint has never been handled quite in that way before or since. Moreover, Rembrandt's curiosity about human nature is always sympathetic, always kindly. In the earlier stages of his development, and in the days of his prosperity, he occasionally allows himself those little outbursts of youthful insolence which are perfectly natural to his own somewhat unstable character, as he has so clearly portrayed it for us in his many portraits of himself. Rembrandt was one of the few Dutchmen whose imagination was so fertile and so opulent that he could live in a world of beauty of his own creation and could portray common-place folk gilded and glorified by that beauty. So long as things went well with him, so long as he could be surrounded with the material splendours of silk and velvet, furs and jewels, his imagination ran on magnificent lines, and depth of colour and golden glow of light, so wonderfully realized in "The Jewish Bride," and many of his "Saskia" portraits, were the first essentials of his method of vision. He did not see deeply into character in those days, but he saw enough of it through his own rose-coloured spectacles to be only gently amused at stupidity and dullness, and to mitigate it as best he might in his rendering of his subject, as in the National Gallery "Portrait of Françoise van Wasserhoven" (775), and to be so impressed by respectability and prosperity as to give them an added dignity like that of his portrait of Elizabeth Jacobs Bas; and when misfortune fell upon him, and splendour departed from his surroundings, he did not turn and gird at fortune, but found, in new conditions, new inspiration and the means to see and render the simpler beauties of light and atmosphere and shadow. Insolence gives way to a deep and passionate tenderness, and if we set side by side with one another three pictures, "The 'Anatomy' of Dr. Tulp," "The Young Warrior" at Glasgow, and "The Adoration of the Shepherds" at the National Gallery (47), we shall see three Rembrandts, three different men, yet all springing from the same warm and sensitive personality, which found new worlds to conquer as fast as those that he had conquered fell away from him. His second blooming, under the influence of Hendrikje Stoëffels, while it puts into the background the strong religious feeling which marks his days of most evil fortune, substitutes for it a kind of quiet faithfulness. There comes back



into his work much of the rich colour of his first period, strengthened and ennobled by an added sense of spatial depth and a deeper insight into human character ; and as time goes on, there grows in Rembrandt an astounding faculty of sympathy, which enables him to see weakness and to forgive it, to imprint upon the features of a model taken from the streets the dignity of a citizen grown old in the service of his city, or the immemorial wisdom of an ancient and exiled race. His " Burgomaster " (1674), and the " Jewish Rabbi " (190), both in the National Gallery, illustrate this astonishing phase of his development. All through his life ran the strong thread of an egotism which never made him merely impatient of things, or prone to self-excuse. If all the portraits which Rembrandt ever painted of himself were placed side by side, it would become quite clear that after his first period of easily earned triumph, and the disaster which ended it, Rembrandt never sought to excuse himself for, or to make himself blind to any of those weaknesses which were the cause of most of his misfortune. A true Dutchman, he tells the truth, even about himself, and about himself more relentlessly, more unkindly than about anyone else whom he ever painted.

## §

Quite apart, however, from Hals and Rembrandt, the great body of Dutch portrait painting is one of the most important groups of its kind in the history of European art. Early in the development of distinctively Dutch portrait painting, the artist realised that while his patron demanded little or nothing more than a likeness, he himself was free to treat portrait painting as a continual exercise in the development and modification of his own outlook both upon his craft, and upon abstract pictorial beauty ; and the contrast, for example, between Michiel Jansz Mierevelt's " Child with a Parrot," and his " Portrait of John van Oldenbarnevelt " at Amsterdam, is one which reveals a tremendous change in the painter himself, as a painter, but practically none in his attitude towards the function of a portrait as a portrait, and the result carries with it automatically an increased vigour in characterization. Both are primarily telling likenesses, but the first is a highly stylised piece of pattern, and the second is a marvellous study of light effect and modelling. It is not so much increased in truthfulness as changed in its attitude towards

the essentials of truth in vision. In the same way, the group, "The Choice of a Lover," by Moeyaert, in the same Gallery, is a collection of portraits, although in strict classification it is a genre subject, but it is more than either of these ; it is a very remarkable study of lighting and grouping of figures. The family group by Michael Sweerts, in the National Gallery, is superficially nothing but a portrait group ; actually, it is an exercise in tone and interior lighting strongly suggestive of the quality and mental attitude of Vermeer. All through Dutch portraiture, we are constantly confronted with this puzzling duality of purpose, and this is further complicated from time to time by the obvious aim of the painter to echo or to modify the manner of another and perhaps a greater artist. For example, Aert de Gelder is constantly reminiscent of Rembrandt, whose pupil he was, but the reminiscence arises from a similarity in the handling of glowing colour and the appearance of dramatic or emotional expression. It is in essence entirely a superficial resemblance, and de Gelder is not really so closely concerned with the personality of his sitter as a first glance would give us to believe. Nicolas Maes chose another aspect of Rembrandt for imitation, namely vigorous contrasts of light and shade, and further imports into a good deal of his portraiture an atmosphere of rather feeble sentiment. Indeed, Maes was not really a portrait painter ; his whole natural tendency was in the direction of sentimental genre, and he can scarcely keep this out of his most formal portrait painting.

A much more interesting character as a painter is Karel Fabritius, whose delicate susceptibility to open air light effect is most skilfully utilised in such a portrait as that of Abraham de Notte at Amsterdam. In this, and equally in "The Linnet," a work of utterly different character, Fabritius' sole personal concern is that of light and tone, of which the portrait and the bird are both the unresisting medium. If Fabritius had lived longer (he was killed in an explosion at Delft, at the age of thirty), it is quite likely that he would have ranked among the great aesthetic adventurers of Dutch painting, side by side with Rembrandt, Vermeer and Seghers ; but although so little of his work survives, he stands out quite plainly as a man with a strongly individual artistic point of view, which would have enabled him to give his own character to any subject which came under his hand.

In a very different category, but of no less importance is the vigorous external characterization of Ferdinand Bol. Though his "Portrait of a Man" at Munich is strongly reminiscent of Rembrandt, to whom indeed he owed much, its primary interest lies in the arrangement of the composition in such a way as to underline, by distribution of light, the personality of the sitter, and his more formal portraits of Admiral Ruyter, and of the sculptor Artus Quellinus, at Amsterdam, show exactly the same skilful if rather theatrical forcing of personality by means, in this case, of a more elaborate compositional mechanism; yet all three alike turn out to be nothing more than pictures, that is to say, that while they leave upon the mind a strong impression of what each man was like, and do so with such emphatic individuality of method as to make it difficult to imagine those men in any other surroundings or attitude, they do not really go below the surface of character any more than or perhaps even as much as Thomas de Keyser's simple records of human features and human expressions, such as his delightfully sympathetic "Portrait of Admiral Pietersz. Hein," also at Amsterdam. The most brilliantly convincing of all these orthodox Dutch painters of portraits was Bartholomeus van der Helst, who could turn out portrait after portrait, all immediately recognisable as from his hand, all impressed with what we may call the type-characteristic of their several subjects, and at the same time, entirely unrevealing. That delicious mountain of fat, Gerard Bicker Andriez, is a superb composition, a beautiful piece of colour and drawing, and a gorgeous joke of human form; and the portrait of Admiral Kortenaar, with his blind eye and his big bluff appearance, is just such another faithful record of keenly observed but entirely uninterpreted externalities.

There is far more penetration in even such a wholly official production as van Ravesteyn's "Portrait of Colonel Nicolaas Smeltzing" at Amsterdam, as though the school of the Hague had a natural instinct for the truly characteristic aspect of their subjects, without in the least attempting to analyse what that aspect meant; and in the work of Nicolaes Pickenoy, there are a gentle seriousness and an instinctive sense of grace very rare in Dutch painting, which seem to show that this painter had in him just a faint tendency towards that self-revelation which made Hals and Rembrandt stand a head and shoulders above their fellows.

In the debatable territory between portraiture and genre, the work of



Dou far surpasses in portrait instinct that of Nicholas Maes. In the "Day-dreamer," at Amsterdam, Nicolas Maes, in a singularly close approach in mechanical arrangement to the work of Dou, perhaps touches his high water mark of interpretative portraiture, and we may, without loss of credit to Maes, place this picture side by side with Dou's portrait of himself at Amsterdam, or the other very different version of the same subject at a more advanced age, which hangs in the Munich Gallery ; but in pure portraiture, there is no doubt of the superiority of Dou over Maes, for he does not mask characterization by artificial sentiment.

However, the minute method of Dou militated against freedom of production in portraiture, and it is rather by his influence upon Metsu that he acquires importance in this field ; for the " Old Woman Reading " at Amsterdam, by Metsu, though strictly a genre subject, far surpasses in vigour of characterization anything produced by either Dou or Maes.

Reference has already been made to the portraiture of Terborch, and to the strong influence of Spain upon his work, both from the technical and from the temperamental point of view, and in this respect, he stands so much by himself among Dutch painters as to have had very little influence upon his contemporaries and successors, who concentrated more upon imitation of his genre style and its wealth of detail than upon the rather aloof magnificence of his portraits. When we come to the later phases of Dutch portraiture, we find in fact that this genre obsession gradually drives out any interest which the portrait proper might have possessed, and portraits themselves became almost conscientiously uninteresting, as a kind of unconscious protest against the comparative playfulness of the genre style. Neither the psychological insight of Rembrandt, nor the psychological impressionism of Hals, found any true successor in Holland, and like every other department of Dutch painting, portraiture subsided into rather a finicking and over-elaborated species of still-life design. This perfected craftsmanship was of immense service to England, for it was out of the craftsmanlike facility and picture-making science of Sir Peter Lely that the first really competent control by Englishmen of the tools of painting was evolved ; but as a sole source of excellence, in a country like Holland, already accustomed to fine craftsmanship, it was not enough to keep the vigour of Dutch painting alive. Nor had Holland any clear tradition to tide her over a time of flagging in-

spiration. The vigorous vitality with which she had emerged from the struggle with Spain had died down, and the frankness and simplicity which had been the strength of her art had gone with it. Her slight contact with Italian art had given her nothing better than Gerard Honthorst, who at best was a second-rate and acutely self-conscious Caravaggio, redeemed by a certain honesty in his handling of the subject-aspect of his works, which degenerates into pathetic clumsiness when he attempts to combine a Dutch subject with a classical manner. To be sure, Rembrandt gained something from him, but what he took he transformed so completely as to leave no trace of its Italian source. Terbruggen, if he had lived, might have done the same for himself, for though he was but thirty-seven when he died, he had already shaken off manner and had achieved style, and the clean light that envelopes his figures shone from no other than the open sky of Utrecht. But Poelenburgh, at one end of the 17th century, and van der Werff at the other, make it plain that generally speaking Italy, to so many other nations of artists an abiding refuge and constant restorer of inspiration, was to Holland little short of a disaster. So for a time, the art of Holland sank to the craftsman's level, and Dutchmen, hired for their manual skill, painted draperies in English studios for English painters who could not learn to draw.

## PLATES IN COLOUR







MIEREVELD

A Child with a Parrot  
(Petrograd, Hermitage Galleries)







GERARD DOU  
The Herring Seller  
(Petrograd, Hermitage Galleries)





TERBORCH

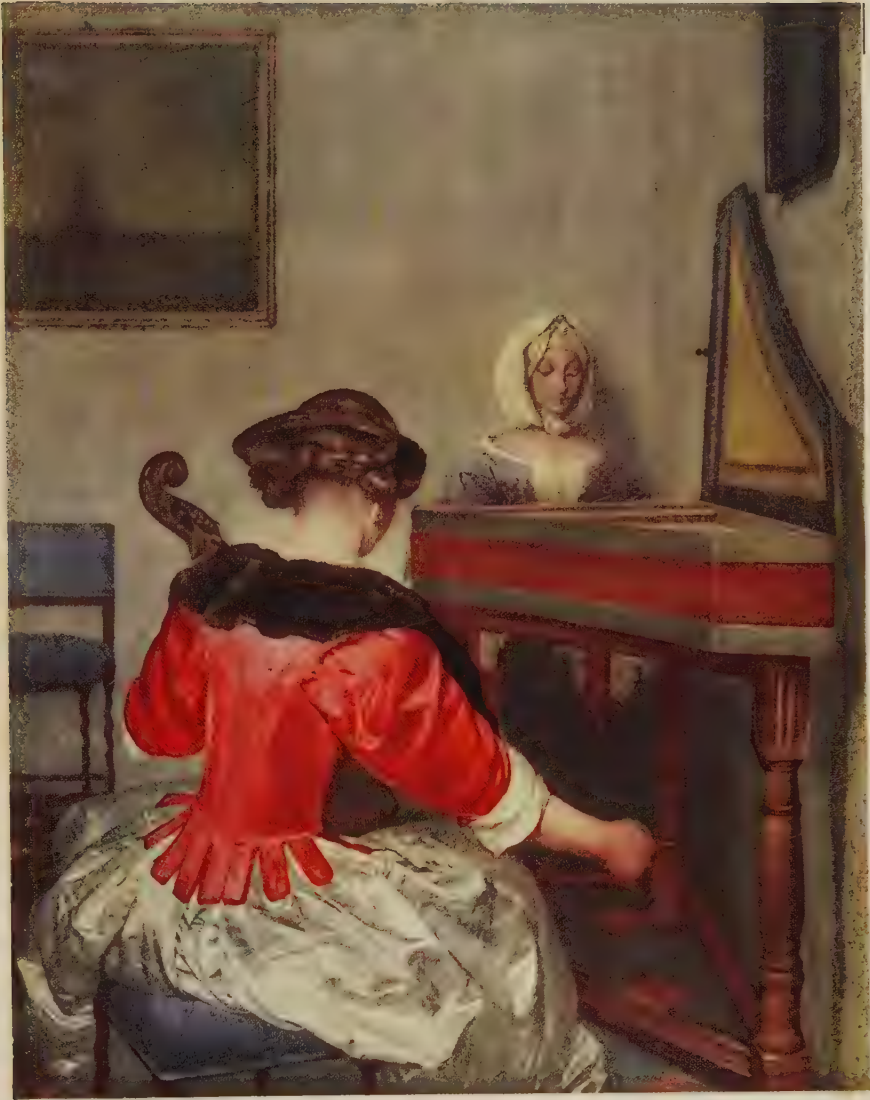
The Letter

(London, Buckingham Palace)

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TERBORCH  
The Concert  
(Berlin, Kaiser-Friedrich Museum)







VERMEER  
Head of a Girl  
(*The Hague, Mauritshuis*)





VERMEER  
View of Delft  
(*The Hague, Mauritshuis*)







DE HOOCH

The Card Players

(London, Buckingham Palace)

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DE HOOCH  
The Larder  
(Amsterdam, Rijks Museum)





JAN STEEN

Young Woman at her Toilette  
(London, Buckingham Palace)

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JAN STEEN  
The Poultry-yard  
(*The Hague, Mauritshuis*)







REMBRANDT  
The Stone Bridge  
(Amsterdam, *Rijks Museum*)





REMBRANDT

The Portrait of an Old Lady (Françoise Wasserhoven  
*(London, National Gallery)*)







REMBRANDT

A Young Warrior

*(Glasgow, Corporation Art Gallery)*







JAKOB RUYSDAEL  
The Mill  
(*Amsterdam, Rijks Museum*)





HOBBEWA  
Landscape with a Ruin  
(*London, Wallace Collection*)







VAN DER HEYDEN  
View of the West Church, Amsterdam  
(*London, Wallace Collection*)







CUYP  
Avenue at Meerdervoort  
(*London, Wallace Collection*)





PAUL POTTER  
The Milkmaid  
(London, *Wallace Collection*)







WILLEM VAN DER VELDE  
Shipping in a Calm Sea  
(*The Hague, Mauritshuis*)





FRANZ HALS  
The Jester  
(Amsterdam, *Rijks Museum*)







NICHOLAS MAES  
An old Woman Spinning  
(*Amsterdam, Rijks Museum*)





KAREL FABRITIUS  
The Linnet  
(*The Hague, Mauritzhuis*)

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KQ-369-779

